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HHS DEPUTY SECRETARY ALEX AZAR JOINS GOVERNOR CORZINE AT NEW JERSEY PANDEMIC PLANNING SUMMIT

Acknowledging that pandemics happen and require a strong local response, HHS Deputy Secretary Alex Azar and New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine signed a resolution, committing the state and federal government to planning efforts. They did so before an audience of public health officials, business and community leaders, gathered to address pandemic flu preparedness. Deputy Secretary Azar is in New Jersey as part of a national tour of states, as the federal government prepares the country for a potential influenza pandemic.

“Pandemics are global in nature but their effects are always local, so I am pleased that Governor Corzine is taking a leadership role to prepare New Jersey for this threat,” Deputy Secretary Azar said. “Pandemic planning needs to address how schools, businesses, public agencies, faith-based organizations and others participate in pandemic preparedness. With this meeting, local officials can identify needs specific to New Jersey communities and continue their coordinated efforts to assure readiness if a pandemic outbreak strikes.”

“The good news is that New Jersey has been preparing for a possible pandemic for years,” Governor Corzine said. “Today’s summit with HHS brings our important partners from throughout the state to the table to ensure on-going coordination and preparation to protect New Jersey residents against a possible public health threat.”

In the planning resolution, HHS commits to providing guidance and technical assistance to New Jersey. This includes an initial \$2,601,641 for planning, and HHS agrees to review the state’s plans for use, storage and distribution of antivirals and notify it of its portion of the federal stockpile of pandemic influenza antiviral drugs. New Jersey agrees to assure that its operational plan for pandemic influenza response is an integral element of the overall state and local emergency response plan and to establish a Pandemic Preparedness Coordinating Committee representing all relevant stakeholders. The state will also notify HHS of the amount of additional pandemic influenza antiviral drugs it will plan to purchase and continue exercising its preparedness plan.

The event gives a broad range of organizations an opportunity to participate in the process. Invited guests include first responders, business leaders, educators, health care providers, faith-based organizations, volunteer agencies, policy makers and others.

HHS has also prepared tools to help with the planning process, including checklists for state and local governments, businesses, individuals and families, faith-based organizations, as well as many others. All checklists as well as other preparedness tools are available at www.pandemicflu.gov.

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt outlined a series of in-state summits to address pandemic preparedness on Dec. 5th. The in-state summits help the public health and emergency response community in each state inform and involve their political, economic and community leadership in this process. Secretary Leavitt and other top HHS officials have conducted more than 45 of the meetings over the past several months.

More information on pandemic flu readiness is available at www.pandemicflu.gov.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.